

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 293 186

CS 506 111

AUTHOR Rancer, Andrew S.; Niemasz, JoAnn
TITLE The Influence of Argumentativeness and Verbal Aggressiveness in Intrafamily Violence.
PUB DATE Apr 88
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Communication Association (79th, Baltimore, MD, April 27-May 1, 1988).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Information Analyses (070)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Aggression; Battered Women; *Communication Problems; Communication Research; Conflict; Emotional Response; Family (Sociological Unit); Family Problems; *Family Violence; Marital Instability; Models; Self Concept
IDENTIFIERS *Argumentativeness; Communication Behavior; Communication Patterns; Conflict Management; Family Communication; *Verbal Abuse

ABSTRACT

In order to identify causes of spousal abuse, current research efforts have attempted to reconstruct the communicative components of physically aggressive encounters within the family. An interactionist model of intrafamily violence, proposed by D. A. Infante, suggests that the interaction of personal, situational, and societal conditions may lead to physically aggressive behavior. Because of an argumentative skill deficiency, individuals may move more quickly from attacking each others' positions on issues, to attacking each others' self-concepts, and then to attacking each other physically. Verbal aggressiveness, possibly a result of an argumentative skill deficiency, is a destructive form of communication which often provokes physical aggression. Several other factors may contribute to, or provoke, violent interaction: a limited repertoire of conflict management strategies; inability to express feelings or emotions; attributions of hidden meaning; and a lack of--or too much--aggressiveness. Training both abused and abusive spouses in methods of constructive argument may lead to the reduction of verbal aggression, and hence, physical aggression. (A figure of an interactionist model of intrafamily violence and 17 references are appended.) (MM)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED293186

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Andrew S. Rancer

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official
ERIC position or policy.

THE INFLUENCE OF ARGUMENTATIVENESS AND VERBAL AGGRESSIVENESS
IN INTRAFAMILY VIOLENCE

Andrew S. Rancer JoAnn Niemasz

Division of Communication Studies
EMERSON COLLEGE
100 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02116

Paper presented to the Eastern Communication Association
Convention, Baltimore, Maryland, April 30, 1988.

05506111

THE INFLUENCE OF ARGUMENTATIVENESS AND VERBAL AGGRESSIVENESS IN INTRAFAMILY VIOLENCE

With increasing frequency, researchers are investigating intrafamily violence from a communication orientation (Chandler, Geist & Norton, 1983; Chandler, 1986, 1985; Whitchurch, 1987; Infante, Chandler & Rudd, 1988).

Recent research suggests that spousal abuse has circular causality. That is, each spouse "contributes to the violent interaction by either provoking violence or being provoked to violence" (Chandler, Geist & Norton, 1983, p. 12).

In order to understand more fully events which lead to violent or physically aggressive behavior, it may be necessary to start with the event and work backwards. Current research efforts have attempted to reconstruct the communicative components of a physically aggressive encounter in order to identify areas of concern (Chandler, 1986; Infante, Chandler & Rudd, 1988).

AN ARGUMENTATIVE SKILL DEFICIENCY MODEL OF INTRAFAMILY VIOLENCE

Infante (1988, 1987) has suggested an interactionist model of intrafamily violence (see Figure 1). This model suggests that the interaction of personal, situational and societal conditions may lead to physically aggressive behavior. More specifically, the model suggests that individuals who suffer from an argumentative skill deficiency may be more prone to physically

aggressive behavior. In the context of intimate interaction or marital communication, this argumentative skill deficiency may lead to spousal violence. Infante (1987) and Infante, Chandler and Rudd (1988) assert that violence in a marriage is more likely when one, or both, of the spouses lacks skill in argumentative communication.

According to the model, spousal abuse is culminated by physical aggression. This physical aggression is often preceeded by verbal aggression. Infante (1987), Infante and Wigley (1986), Rancer, Baukus and Infante (1985) and Infante, Chandler and Rudd (1988) suggest that verbal aggressiveness may be due, in large part, to an argumentative skill deficiency. When individuals lack the ability and motivation to argue, they may resort to verbal aggression. If frustration continues, and the conflict has not been resolved, verbal aggressiveness may lead to physical aggression.

Infante, Chandler and Rudd (1988) report some data which has supported the assumptions of the model. Before these findings are discussed, it is important to review the two communication predispositions which have been found to account for some variance in intrafamily violence.

ARGUMENTATIVENESS AND VERBAL AGGRESSIVENESS

Infante and Rancer (1982) define argumentativeness as a generally stable trait which predisposes individuals in communication situations to advocate positions on controversial issues and to verbally challenge the positions that others take

on those issues. The Argumentativeness Scale (Infante & Rancer, 1982) is the tool used to measure the trait predisposition of argumentativeness. Two dimensions are measured: an individual's motivational tendency to approach arguments, and an individual's motivational tendency to avoid arguments. A person's general tendency to be argumentative (ARGgt) is the result of the subtraction of the ARGav (avoidance) score from the ARGap (approach) score. Research indicates that individuals who score low in trait argumentativeness are perceived as less skilled in arguing, less willing to argue, and perceived as lower in expertise and dynamism (Infante, 1981, 1982, 1985).

Argumentativeness has been conceptually and empirically distinguished from verbal aggressiveness. In verbal aggression, individuals attack another's self-concept instead of, or in addition to, their position on an issue (Infante, 1988; Infante & Wigley, 1986; Infante & Rancer, 1982). Argumentativeness is conceptualized as a constructive form of communication, while verbal aggressiveness is conceptualized as a destructive form of communication (Infante, 1988). Verbal aggressiveness is measured by the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale (Infante & Wigley, 1986). This uni-dimensional instrument identifies the predisposition of individuals to use verbally aggressive messages during a social conflict situation. Since argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness are conceptually and empirically distinct constructs, individuals can score high on both, low on both, high on one construct and low on the other.

The most fundamental outcome of verbal aggression is self-concept damage. Verbally aggressive messages are usually

delivered in the form of put-down's or insults. Verbal aggression in the form of a put-down or insult makes a person look "bad." In order to protect him/herself from further attacks, or to "save face," the victim of verbal aggression frequently retaliates. This outcome is especially prevalent when the recipient of the verbal aggression thinks the attack was intentional, unwarranted, or witnessed by someone else (Infante, 1986).

A TAXONOMY OF VERBAL AGGRESSION

A taxonomy of verbally aggressive messages has been developed by Infante (1988) and Infante and Wigley (1986). These verbally aggressive messages can take the form of: character attacks, competence attacks (such as attacks on a spouse's sexual ability, the inferior nature of one's job, lack of success in providing for the family), physical appearance attacks, background attacks, accusations, profanity, ridicule, threats, and even non-verbal emblems.

Infante (1988), Infante and Wigley (1986) and Infante, Chandler and Rudd (1988) offer several explanations for why individuals are induced to verbal aggression in conflict situations. These include: psychopathology (a verbal manifestation or repressed hostility), disdain (verbally expressed dislike for another), social learning (society conditions the individual to be verbally aggressive). The fourth explanation is that verbal aggressiveness is the outcome of an argumentative skill deficiency.

A high score on the verbal aggressiveness scale (Infante & Wigley, 1986), coupled with a low score on the argumentativeness scale (Infante & Rancer, 1982) may be one indicant that could signal physical aggression in couples experiencing social conflict. Research has found that people who are skilled in argument, or high in argumentativeness are not as easily provoked to verbal aggression, even if their opponent is obstinate (Infante, Shepherd, Trebing & Seeds, 1984).

Thus, the argumentative skill deficiency model of intrafamily violence would suggest that individuals who are low in argumentativeness and high in verbal aggressiveness may be more prone to physical aggression in family conflict situation. This counterintuitive prediction was tested in a recent study conducted by Infante, Chandler and Rudd (1988). A sample of abused wives and abusive husbands completed modified versions of both the Argumentativeness and Verbal Aggressiveness scales. Their scores were compared to those of women and men in nonabusive relationships.

Support for the model was obtained. Individuals who experienced violence in marital communication were lower in argumentativeness and higher in verbal aggressiveness than a control group of individuals who did not report instances of violent or physically aggressive behavior.

Chandler (1985) found that when emotional and psychological abuse is noted, the abuse became a "mutually produced phenomena" (p. 1). Researchers note that the steady escalation of verbal aggression in conflict situations becomes a habit, and a preferred method of interaction (see Yelsma, 1984; Chandler,

1985). Because of the lack of skill in argument, individuals may move more quickly from attacking each others' positions on issues, to attacking each others' self-concepts, to attacking each other physically. Since abuse becomes a "mutually produced phenomena" (Chandler, 1985), once one partner enters into verbally aggressive behavior, the other may feel justified into using it. Chandler (1986) suggests that abusive actions exhibited by the partner are reinforced or encouraged at each stage of the conflict process. Chandler, Geist and Norton (1983) identified several factors as contributing to, or provoking violent interaction: limited repertoire of conflict management strategies, inability to express feelings or emotions, "mind-reading," attributions of hidden meaning, and, a lack of, or too much assertiveness.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR STUDYING AGGRESSIVE COMMUNICATION AND INTRAFAMILY VIOLENCE

Infante, Chandler and Rudd (1988) found that females in violent relationships reported not only lower levels of argumentativeness, but higher levels of verbal aggressiveness than did females in the "control" group. Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz (1981) identified that in almost half of the abusive relationships studied, both spouses indicate that they had each contributed to the violent interaction through physical or nonphysical behavior. Coleman (1980) reported that many males abused their spouses in response to verbal aggression.

Infante (1988) suggests that in order to counter and control

verbally aggressive behavior, knowledge of the types of messages which are likely to be delivered in conflict situations must be studied. If victims of abuse report higher levels of verbally aggressive communication (Infante, Chandler & Rudd, 1988), and if verbal aggression tends to escalate the abuse cycle (Chandler, 1986; Infante, Chandler & Rudd, 1988) then it may be profitable to investigate more thoroughly how verbal aggression leads to physical aggression. For example, which verbally aggressive messages are most instigative in provoking spouses to physical aggression? At what point does a person's predisposition to verbal aggressiveness become so dysfunctional as to stimulate the escalation toward physical aggression? How can we train distressed couples to alter their communication patterns and become more argumentative, and less verbally aggressive? Training both abused and abusive spouses in methods of constructive argument (Infante, 1988) may lead to the reduction of verbal aggression, and hence, physical aggression.

Communication scholars, working in tandem with psychologists, social workers, family therapists and other counseling professionals may help shed light on methods of reducing intrafamily violence. This panel represents a unique step in that direction.

REFERENCES

- Chandler, T.A. (1986, October). Perceptions of communication in acute battering incidents. Paper presented at the meeting of the Speech Communication Association of Ohio, Columbus, OH.
- Chandler, T.A. (1985, November). Interaction in abusive relationships: A review and critique of methods used in the study of spouse abuse. Paper presented at the meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Denver, CO.
- Chandler, T.A., Geist, P.R., & Norton, R.W. (1983, May). The relationship between marital violence, self-esteem, and interaction: An exploratory study. Paper presented at the meeting of the International Communication Association, Dallas, TX.
- Coleman, K.H. (1980). Conjugal violence: What 33 men report. Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 6, 207-213.
- Infante, D.A. (1988). Arguing constructively. Prospect Heights, ILL: Waveland Press.
- Infante, D.A. (1987). Aggressiveness. In J.C. McCroskey & J.A. Daly (Eds.), Personality and interpersonal communication (pp. 157-192). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Infante, D.A. (1985, November). Response to high argumentatives: Message and sex differences. Paper presented at the meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Denver, CO.

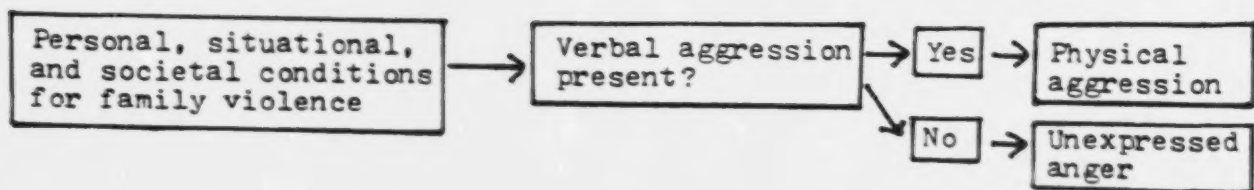
- Infante, D.A. (1982). The argumentative student in the speech communication classroom: An investigation and implications. Communication Education, 31, 141-148.
- Infante, D.A. (1981). Trait argumentativeness as a predictor of communicative behavior in situations requiring argument. Central States Speech Journal, 32, 265-272.
- Infante, D.A., Chandler, T.A., & Rudd, J.E. (1988, November). Test of a communication model of interspousal violence. Paper presented at the meeting of the Speech Communication Association, New Orleans, LA.
- Infante, D.A., & Rancer, A.S. (1982). A conceptualization and measure of argumentativeness. Journal of Personality Assessment, 46, 72-80.
- Infante, D.A., Trebing, J.D., Shepherd, F.E., & Seeds, D.E. (1984). The relationship of argumentativeness to verbal aggression. Southern Speech Communication Journal, 50, 67-77.
- Infante, D.A., & Wigley, C.J. (1986). Verbal aggressiveness: An interpersonal model and measure. Communication Monographs, 53, 61-69.
- Rancer, A.S., Baukus, R.A., & Infante, D.A. (1985). Relations between argumentativeness and belief structures about arguing. Communication Education, 34, 37-47.
- Straus, M.A., Gelles, R.J., & Steinmetz, S.K. (1981). Behind closed doors: Violence in the American family. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

- Whitchurch, G.G. (1987, July). Linkages in conjugal violence and communication: A review and critical appraisal. Paper presented at the Third National Family Violence Conference for Researchers, Durham, NH.
- Yelsma, P. (1984). Functional conflict management in effective marital adjustment. Communication Quarterly, 32, 51-61.

FIGURE 1

AN INTERACTIONIST MODEL OF INTRAFAMILY VIOLENCE

Dominic A. Infante
Kent State University



Some personal conditions

hostile personality
low self-esteem
poor verbal ability

Some situational conditions

frustrations
revenge
alcoholic consumption

Some societal conditions

poverty
prejudice
sanctioned violence

Types of verbal aggression

character attacks
competence attacks
physical appearance attacks
background attacks
maledictions
teasing
ridicule
threats
profanity
nonverbal emblems

Causes of verbal aggressiveness

psychopathology
disdain
social learning
argumentative skill deficiency

